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CIA's Involvement Appalling

Several days after the Watergate burglary of last June 17 my wife and I went to a screening party at the Motion Picture Association headquarters here. We chanced to sit beside Richard Helms, then director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and his wife Cynthia.

The pre-film conversation turned to Watergate.

"This Watergate thing is so ridiculous that if you wrote it as fiction the publisher would laugh you out of his office," Cynthia said.

Helms laughed and, in the course of a brief discussion, dropped one comment that, as my close friends know, has bothered me ever since.

"Cynthia and I had been up late and had just fallen asleep when they telephoned me to tell me that these fellows had been arrested in the Watergate," he said.

"Why," I asked myself and my friends for months, "would anyone call the CIA director in the wee hours of the morning about some arrests in a burglary unless the CIA was involved?"

But I just couldn't write about that remark. I couldn't prove CIA involvement in Watergate, and I didn't want to believe the CIA was involved in this kind of political crime. So the most I could bring myself to write was this, on August 6, 1972:

"The previous employment of several of those involved in 'the Watergate caper' and recent

strange revelations of big money floating into bank accounts out of nowhere have aroused some serious misgivings that the Central Intelligence Agency was involved. But for what reason? Not partisan political purposes surely."

I guess I wasn't cynical enough or mean enough to put my larger suspicions into print. I truly regret that bit of cautiousness.

Well, the chilling truth is now out. The CIA has become involved in political crime as ordered by the White House and that is a sinister development that overshadows everything else that has gushed forth from this cesspool we call Watergate.

E. Howard Hunt, the convicted Watergate burglar and ex-CIA agent (and who knows when if ever he became an "ex" agent?), has testified that the CIA provided cameras, disguises, false papers and other assistance when he and G. Gordon Liddy burglarized the office of the psychiatrist of Daniel Ellsberg, now on trial in connection with the Pentagon papers.

The New York Times has reported that the CIA role was approved by Gen. Robert E. Cushman Jr., Helms' deputy and now the Marine Corps commandant.

How can I interpret Helms' comment at that movie party in the light of these recent disclosures?

I can only conclude that the CIA was up to its arm-

pits in the dirty work masterminded by Hunt and Liddy, in the Ellsberg case but also in the Watergate crime. I can only conclude that this vast organization with all its secret money, all its capacity for eavesdropping and other dirty tricks, was turned into an apparatus for perpetuating the power of Richard Nixon and his cronies.

You can bet that this kind of corruption of the purpose of the CIA was not taken lightly by Helms (and do not believe for a moment that Cushman approved this frightening gambit without Helms' knowledge). I can damn well guarantee you that the CIA became involved only on direct orders from the President, or orders from Haldeman or Ehrlichman, claiming to speak directly for the President.

In either case, no presidential assistants or appointees such as Helms would undertake so serious a violation of the intended role of the CIA without assurances of presidential knowledge and approval.

So that old campaign button finally speaks the truth: "NIXON'S THE ONE."

There is a question that hounds us all, and the answer is almost unspeakable except in private surroundings. When a president is riding the top of the world, hogging the glory and the headlines with reelection virtually assured, why resort to such malevolent police state tactics? It defies rational explanation.

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